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IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN (IA)
30 October 1985

FILE ONLY

CIA on campus: Moral issue, or legal right?

By Jerry Meth
The Press-Citizen

The University of Iowa would undoubtedly find itself in court if it prohibited the Central Intelligence Agency from recruiting on campus, a law professor said Tuesday.

"I think there's a constitutional question... if the university didn't like (the CIA's) point of view," said William Buss, a UI expert on constitutional law. "If the CIA is not... violating University of Iowa guidelines, there's no problem."

"I don't find what the CIA is doing very attractive," Buss said. "But the question is not whether it's attractive. The question is whether the CIA is permitted to recruit on campus. The university ought to be very slow in taking a position that affects and controls activities based on moral judgments."

Buss was one of several speakers appearing at a forum in Van Allen Hall to discuss whether the CIA should be allowed on campus to conduct job interviews.

Most in the audience contended that UI officials should bar the agency because of its violent and illegal activities. Failure to do so implies a complicity between UI and the CIA, they said.

The forum came in advance of a CIA recruiter who is here for interviews with more than 20 UI students today and Thursday.

In the face of expected protests by CIA Off Campus, a group comprised of UI students and faculty, security precautions were put in place today at the Iowa Memorial Union, where the interviews are being conducted at the career placement office.

The elevator to the third-floor office was shut down and one of two stairwells was locked. Students were screened in the second stairwell as UI officials and campus security officers moved to prevent

disruptions of interviews. One protester carried a picket in a ground floor lobby.

At the forum, Phillip Jones, UI Dean of Student Services, defended the university's policies regulating recruiting, saying that all employers must abide by affirmative action and equal opportunity laws or they won't be allowed on campus.

"Students may or may not interview with various employers," Jones said. "The choice is up to those seeking the opportunities."

Opponents of CIA recruitment activities frequently tried to draw Jones into a discussion of the moral and ethical implications of CIA activities. But Jones said he would defend UI's policies, but would not discuss the agency itself.

Sheldon Pollock, a UI associate professor of religion, said the CIA should be prohibited from conducting on-campus interviews because it has violated national and international laws, violated human rights laws, engages in violent activities and works to subvert a free and open exchange of ideas.

Prohibiting the CIA on campus is no less a political statement than permitting the agency to interview students on campus, Pollock said.

In addition, UI officials should determine if any professors are working or receiving research funds from the CIA, Pollock said. "Failure to disclose such matters poses a genuine threat to academic freedom," he said.

Earlier Tuesday, UI officials said there is no CIA-funded research on campus.

Scott Friedhoff, a UI graduate student in higher education, said he worried about the difficulty of drawing a line on employers appearing on campus.

"Which organizations meet guidelines and which don't?" he asked. "Who's going to make the judgments? It's dangerous."